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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 002767

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: TENSIONS RISE BETWEEN KARZAI AND ABDULLAH CAMPS

REF: A. KABUL 2597

[1](#)B. KABUL 2583

Classified By: D/PolCouns Victoria Alvarado; Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Tensions between Karzai and Abdullah supporters have risen somewhat since the Independent Election Commission's (IEC) September 8 release of near total preliminary results, demonstrated by a dispute between pro-Karzai Minister of Interior Atmar and Pro-Abdullah Balkh Governor Atta. Atta claims "proof" that the Ministry of Interior is trying to provoke violence in his province by distributing weapons and that Minister Atmar is complicit. Atmar called the accusations "baseless and false," and in turn, has called for an investigation of Atta's allegations. In a recent BBC interview with Abdullah, the presidential candidate said the IEC favored President Karzai and that the election was being stolen from the Afghan people. He warned that a fraudulent outcome will lead to illegitimate, unstable rule for another five years. Atmar may have been delegated the responsibility of curtailing Atta's power as a reprisal for his support for Abdullah, although there are also reports that the Karzai government has sent delegations to the North to draw Atta into the government. Atta may be emphasizing electoral fraud to strengthen his bargaining position. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Tensions between Karzai and Abdullah supporters have risen somewhat since the IEC's September 8 release of more preliminary results, which place Karzai above the 50 percent plus one threshold to win the election on the first round. In particular, pro-Karzai Minister of Interior Atmar and Pro-Abdullah Balkh Governor Atta are carrying on a public war of words. According to PRT Mazar, in Atta's remarks for the September 9 commemoration ceremony for Northern Alliance martyr Ahmad Shah Massoud in Mazar-e-Sharif, the governor said the people were angry and frustrated at the egregious levels of fraud tolerated in the August 20 election. Immediately following the elections, Atta had accused the Ministry of Interior of being directly involved in carrying out fraud on Karzai's behalf. This time, he warned that people cannot be prevented from demonstrating for their fundamental right to freely and fairly choose their elected leaders. He also complained that while Balkh province generates over USD 100 million per year in revenues, it receives only 20 percent of that in combined flows from the central government and from international donors.

[1](#)3. (C) According to other Embassy interlocutors, at the same event Atta lambasted the Defense and Interior Ministries for "breaking protesters' teeth" when people have a legal right to peacefully protest, specifically where there has been so much fraud. He also questioned why these same ministries are not prepared to "break the teeth" of the Taleban, when they actually cause so much carnage and violence. Atta openly accused Minister Atmar of distributing weapons to local commanders in an effort to destabilize the provincial status quo. BBC coverage of Atta's comments highlighted his assertion that Minister Atmar was

distributing weapons in some Balkh districts in order to provoke insecurity there. Atta termed Atmar "a Communist who lost a leg fighting the Mujahedeen." The Ministry of Interior released a statement rejecting Governor Atta's assertions, terming them "baseless and false," and asked the Afghan National Security Council and the Attorney General's Office to investigate the allegations.

¶4. (C) According to the local media reports in late August (Ref. B), a source close to Atta claimed that during his trip to the province August 23, that U.S. Special Envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke had asked Noor to take part in the formation of a coalition government in Afghanistan. Atta may have spread this rumor because of his apparent fears that Karzai will remove him from office. More recently, a member of parliament told us that the government was taking steps to limit Atta's powers as a reprisal for his support for Abdullah.

¶5. (C) In a BBC interview with Abdullah on September 9, the presidential candidate said the IEC was on President Karzai's side and that the election was being stolen from the Afghan people. He warned that a fraudulent outcome will lead to illegitimate rule for another five years, which would be a recipe for instability. Abdullah has also told us privately that he is doing his best to put a lid on any possible violent demonstrations and is persuading his followers not to fall into provocation (septel). He alleged that the Karzai administration has recently fired a number of pro-Abdullah teachers.

¶6. (C) Comment: On August 27, Minister Atmar handed us a
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document that reportedly demonstrated Governor Atta was arming forces in Balkh to protest an eventual Karzai victory (Ref. A). We cannot confirm the document's authenticity. Atmar may be seeking to curtail Atta's power as a reprisal for his support for Abdullah. At the same time, there are a number of reports that the Karzai government has sent delegations to the North to draw Atta into the government. Afghans see Atta as a key actor to drawing the Abdullah and Karzai camps together into a coalition government. Atta may be emphasizing electoral fraud to strengthen his bargaining position.

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